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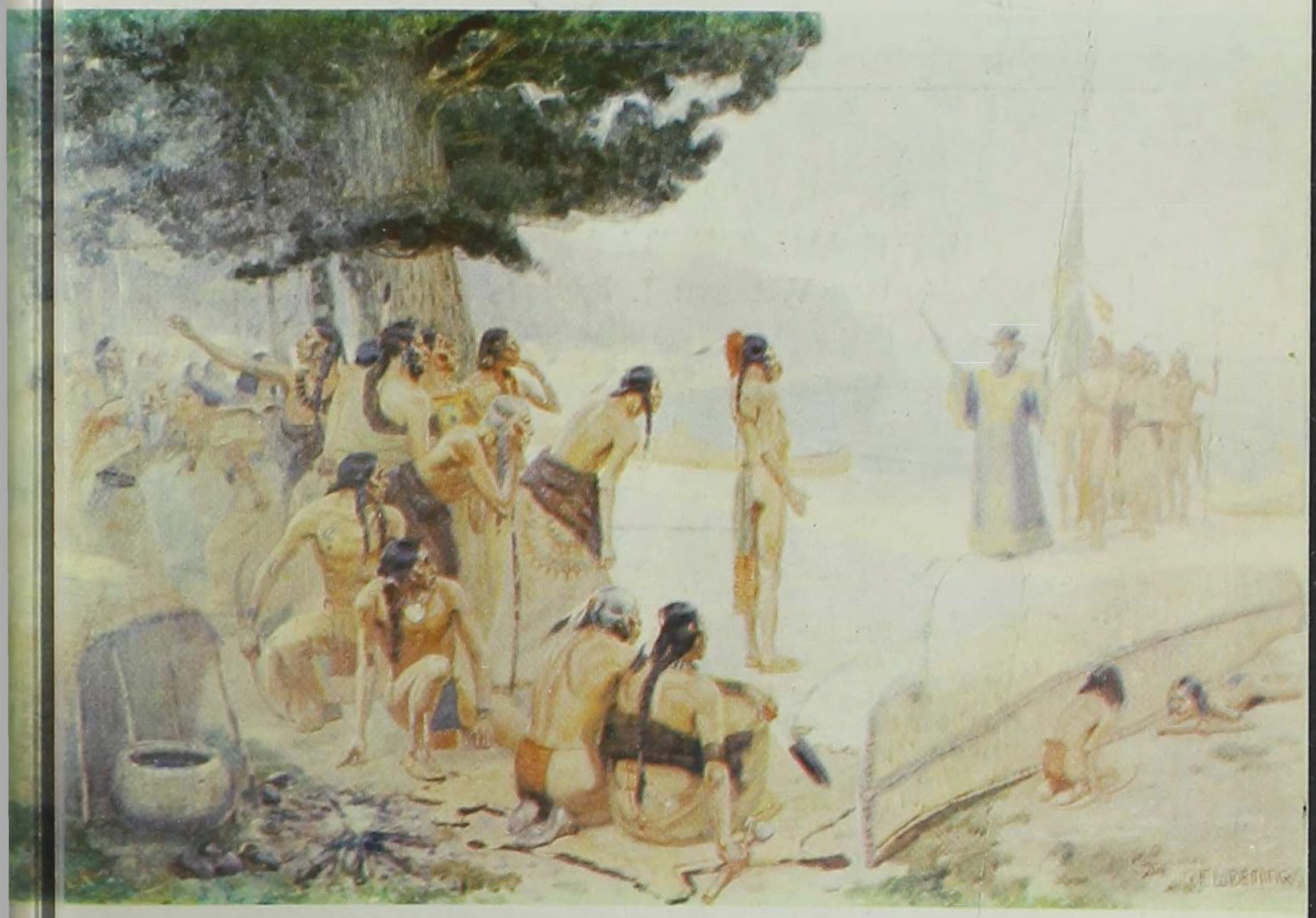
The PALIMPSEST



Nicolet Meeting the Winnebago at Green Bay

The Winnebago Indians

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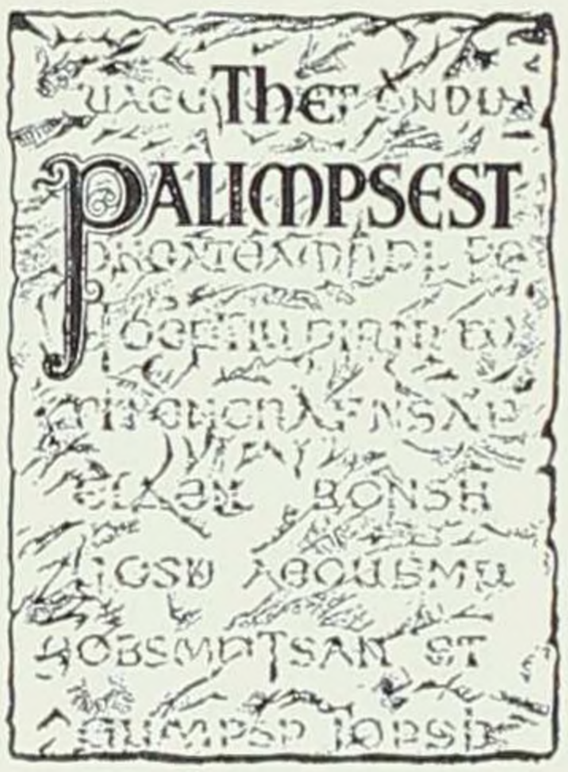

The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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Illustrations

Front Cover — The Deming oil painting is courtesy the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Back Cover and Center Spread — The colored pictures of the Winnebago are from Thomas L. McKenney's *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*. The three black engravings are from illustrations by Captain S. Eastman in Henry R. Schoolcraft's *Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*. The picture of Fort Atkinson is from the collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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Nicolet and the Winnebagoes

Jean Nicolet was about to set out on a dangerous mission. This was nothing new for Nicolet since danger seemed to have accompanied the intrepid Frenchman from the moment he set foot in Quebec. Born in Cherbourg, France, in 1598, Nicolet had so impressed Champlain that he took the adventurous lad with him to New France where he quickly exhibited rare qualities of courage, steadfastness and determination.

Upon their arrival in New France in 1618 Champlain sent young Nicolet to live among the Algonkin Indians on Allumette Island to learn their language, customs, and the art of woodcraft. Nicolet proved to be an apt student and speedily won the respect and admiration of the Algonkins. As a result, he was appointed to serve as interpreter at the famous peace conference between the Algonquian tribes and the Iroquois in 1624.

Nicolet was next assigned the position of official interpreter among the Nipissing Indians who dwelt upon the water route to Lake Huron. His

eight years with the Nipissing were extremely successful — he adopted the virtues but not the vices of the Indians; he took a part in their frequent councils; and he was recognized as a chief of the tribe. In 1632 the enthusiastic Champlain appointed Nicolet "Agent and Interpreter" which placed him largely in charge of Indian affairs in New France.

With such a rich background it is not surprising that Champlain should single out Nicolet to execute the most important albeit dangerous mission facing the French in New France: the search for the Western Sea and the route to China.

Officially, Nicolet was sent out to organize new sources of fur-trading but privately he was told to push on until, if possible, he found the way to the "China Sea." The idea of a passage across America to China had not yet lost its allure. Indeed, Nicolet carried with him, carefully sewn in an oil-skin bag, a handsomely embroidered Chinese mandarin's coat so that, when he came to pay his respects to the Emperor of China, he would be properly dressed.

At this time the Jesuits were re-establishing a missionary outpost at the head of Georgian Bay, from which the Franciscans had been summarily recalled, and had arranged for three of their priests and six laymen to go west with the Huron Indians. It was the custom of the Huron fur-traders to set out from Georgian Bay each sum-

mer with the previous winter's catch for trade with the French at Quebec. Nicolet was ordered by Champlain to accompany the Jesuits and the Huron fur-traders on their return to Georgian Bay.

The journey up the Ottawa River was difficult and dangerous and if Nicolet had little love for his black-robed companions, as was likely, he must have enjoyed their discomfort. Pere Brebeuf wrote of the trip:

> Now when these rapids or torrents are reached, it is necessary to land, and carry on the shoulder through woods or over high and troublesome rocks, all the baggage and the canoes themselves . . . I kept count of the number of portages, and found that we carried our canoes thirty-five times, and dragged them (through white water) at least fifty.

The party finally won its way up the Ottawa and glided over the smooth waters of Lake Nipissing and thence down the French River to Georgian Bay, where the Jesuits at once went to work in the place where the Franciscans had labored.

Nicolet promptly obtained seven Huron guides and set out westward. Doubtless he had memorized his commission carefully and knew that his orders were to visit the "People of the Sea," whom the French believed were Chinese; to make a treaty between them and the French and Hurons; to investigate the possibility of the fur trade; and to discover, if possible, the "Sea to China"

and the way to India. The intrepid Frenchman paddled through Georgian Bay, hugging the northern shore of Lake Huron until he reached the waters leading to Sault Ste. Marie. He did not venture into these waters and thus missed the opportunity of discovering Lake Superior, the mightiest of the Great Lakes. Instead he proceeded to the Strait of Mackinac, glided through that historic passageway, and continued paddling west along the northern shore of Lake Michigan.

Nicolet had heard from tribes all along the way of a strange people without hair or beards who used huge wooden canoes instead of portable canoes of birch bark. Surely, he thought, these must be Chinese or Japanese, who came to this region in ships. As he continued westward he left gifts along the shore of the lake which disappeared during the night but the people themselves were too timid or frightened to appear. Nicolet entered Green Bay and soon was moving along the shore of what is now present-day Wisconsin.

One day Nicolet saw some people lurking in the shadows of the heavily wooded shore. He promptly landed and donned "a grand robe of China damask, all strewn with flowers and birds of many colors," but instead of the Chinese he encountered some filthy Winnebago Indians whose "women and children fled, at the sight of a man who carried thunder in both hands — for thus they called the two pistols that he held."

Nicolet was the first white man to set foot on present-day Wisconsin soil. The dramatic episode has been recorded by artists and is referred to as the landfall of the white man in Wisconsin.

The news of Nicolet's coming quickly spread to the places round about, and there assembled four or five thousand Winnebago. Each of the chiefs made a feast for him, and at one of these banquets they "served at least six score beavers." Well might these dusky Winnebago celebrate the coming of the first white man in their midst; a new era was opening for them in the fur trade.

Thinking civilized China was just a little more to the West, Nicolet went up the Fox River and, after traversing Lake Winnebago, found himself still among Algonquian Indians, whose language he understood. They told him of a great water just a three-days' portage ahead. Had Nicolet taken this three-day trip he would have eventually come into the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien, opposite McGregor in what is now Clayton County, Iowa. The way to Iowa had been found but it was not to be followed for another forty years. Instead, Nicolet turned south, established friendly relations with the Illinois Indians and then returned home, reaching Three Rivers, Quebec, in July of 1635.

Nicolet kept no journal and his explorations were of no immediate value. What his contemporaries thought is found in the *Jesuit Relations*:

> Sieur Nicolet, who has advanced farthest into these so distant countries, has assured me that, if he had sailed three days' journey farther [west] upon a great river which issues from this lake, he would have found the sea. Now I have strong suspicions that this is the sea which answers to that north of New Mexico, and that from this sea there would be an outlet towards Japan and China. Nevertheless, as we do not know whither this great lake tends, or this fresh-water sea, it would be a bold undertaking to go and explore those countries.

The exploits of Nicolet were not capitalized upon because Champlain died and his administration was followed by a series of incompetent governors. The unforgiving Iroquois took advantage of the situation by destroying the remnants of the Huron nation and killing by torture such missionaries as did not escape. Even the French settlements on the St. Lawrence were menaced by the vengeful Iroquois. The fur trade came to a halt.

Although Nicolet had learned many things during his life among the Indians he had failed to master one thing — to swim. In 1642, while on his way down the St. Lawrence to Quebec, his canoe was swamped and Nicolet was drowned.

Nicolet played a two-fold role in Iowa history. First of all, he was the first white man to visit and describe the Winnebago — a tribe intimately associated with Iowa's colorful early days. Secondly, he pointed the way for Joliet and Marquette.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

The Winnebago

The Winnebago had lived in the Green Bay area for many years before the coming of Jean Nicolet. Although their exact identity was unknown to the eastern Woodland Indians they were well-known to their neighbors. The word Winnebago, in the Sauk and Fox language, for example, signified "people of the filthy water." The French likewise associated them with the scummy water of Green Bay and called them Puants. The English referred to them as Stinkards. The Winnebago called themselves *Hock-un-ga-ra,* said to mean Trout Nation. Sometimes they called themselves *Horoji,* or Fish Eaters.

Because of their long association with Green Bay the material culture of the Winnebago was distinctly Woodland, or Algonquian, their houses and dress being practically identical with the Sauk, Fox, Menominee, and others. They were in the early agricultural stage of development when Jean Nicolet visited them in 1634. They were particularly fond of beaver as a food but they ate both fish and fresh-water mussels. From their Menominee neighbors they had learned how to gather, store, and cook wild rice. They used chipped stone implements and a few crude bits of

copper and lead. They made pottery although many of their vessels were fashioned up from gourds, bark, and shells. Apparently the Winnebago did no weaving although they were skillful in plaiting mats out of rushes. They wore skin garments, and very little of these during the hot summer months. Their lodges were built of poles, covered with skin or bark.

Although their material culture was Woodland, the Winnebago tribe was of Siouan or Dakota linguistic stock, their language being related to the Iowa, the Oto, and the Missouri, more distantly to the Omaha, and still more distantly to the Ponca. Their earliest known habitat extended from the south side of Green Bay as far inland as Lake Winnebago. They are known to have had villages in widely scattered sections of present-day Wisconsin, and as far south as what is now LaFayette, Indiana. During the course of a century they seem to have ranged up the Fox River and over to the Wisconsin and Rock rivers.

The Winnebago were frequently at war with their neighbors. They were fierce warriors, as the English and later the Americans learned to their sorrow. They practiced cannibalism only on prisoners taken in war. They fought with the English against the Americans during the Revolutionary War. They played a leading role in the siege of Fort Madison during the War of 1812 and their war whoop echoed up and down the Missis-

sippi during that epic struggle. Their name will forever be associated with the fall of Fort Dearborn.

The Winnebago social organization was based on two phratries — the Upper or Air and the Lower or Earth divisions. The Upper division contained four clans — Thunderbird, War People, Eagle, and Pigeon — and the Lower division eight clans — the Bear, Wolf, Water-spirit, Deer, Elk, Buffalo, Fish, and Snake. An Upper individual had to marry a Lower individual, and vice versa. While there was no law restricting marriage between the clans of the two phratries, there was a tendency for certain clans to intermarry.

The Thunderbird and Bear clans were regarded as the leading clans of their respective phratries. Both had definite functions. The lodge of the Thunderbird was the peace lodge, over which the chief of the tribe presided, and in which disputes between Indians were settled. No person could be killed in the lodge, and an offender or a prisoner escaping to it was protected as long as he was within its precincts.

The lodge of the Bear clan was the war or disciplinary lodge: prisoners were killed and offenders punished in its precincts. The Bear clan also possessed the right of "soldier killing," and was in charge of both ends of the camping circle during the hunt. Each clan had a large number of

individual customs relating to birth, the naming feast, death, and the funeral wake. A member of one clan, for example, could not be buried by members of another clan of the same phratries.

The Winnebago possessed two important tribal ceremonies, the *Mankani,* or Medicine Dance, and the *Wagigo,* or Winter Feast. The Medicine Dance was a secret society, ungraded, into which men and women could be initiated on payment of a certain amount of money. A new member generally succeeded some deceased relative. The general ceremony was open to the public but there were several ceremonies, including a vapor-bath, which were held in secret.

The purpose of the Medicine Dance society was to prolong life and instill certain virtues, none of which were related to war. Their objective was accomplished by a simulated "shooting" of a shell, contained in an otter-skin bag, into the body of the one to be initiated. Although other tribes had similar ceremonies a large part of the Winnebago ritual was fundamentally different.

According to Frederick W. Hodge, the Winter Feast is the only distinctly clan ceremonial among the Winnebago.

Each clan has a sacred clan bundle, which is in the hands of some male individual, who hands it down from one generation to another, always taking care, of course, to keep it in the same clan. The Winter Feast is distinctly a war feast, and the purpose in giving it seems to be

a desire to increase their war powers by a propitiation of all the supernatural deities known to them. To these they offer food and deerskin. There may be as many as twelve (?) powers propitiated, namely, Earth-maker, Disease-giver, Sun, Moon, Morning Star, the spirits of the Night, Thunderbird, One-horn, the Earth, the Water, the Turtle, and the Rabbit.

In addition to the above, there are a number of other ceremonies the best known of which being the Buffalo Dance and the *Herucka*. The Buffalo Dance has for its purpose the magical calling of the Buffalo herds. All who have had supernatural communication with the Buffalo spirit, may become members, irrespective of clan. The Herucka is the same as the Omaha Grass Dance.

The religious beliefs of the Winnebago are practically identical with those of the Dakota, Ponca, and Central Algonquian tribes. The Earthmaker, or *Man'una,* corresponds to the *Gitchi Manito* of the Central Algonquians. Although there are evidences of Central Algonquian influence, the Winnebago mythology shows a much more intimate relation with that of the other Siouan tribes. The following account of the creation was related to Agent Fletcher by Little Hill, a Winnebago chief:

The Great Spirit at first waked up as from a dream, and found himself sitting on a chair. On finding himself alone, he took a piece of his body, near his heart, and a piece of earth, and from them made a man. He then made three other men. After talking with the men the Great

Spirit made a woman, who was this earth, which is the grandmother of the Indians. The four men first created were the four winds — east, west, north and south. The earth, after it was created, rocked about, and the Great Spirit made four beasts and four snakes, and put them under the earth to support it. But when the winds blew the beasts and snakes could not keep the earth steady, and the Great Spirit made a great buffalo and put him under the earth. This buffalo is the land which keeps the earth steady. After the earth became steady, the Great Spirit took a piece of his heart and made a man, and then took a piece of his flesh and made a woman. The man knew a great deal, but the woman knew very little. The Great Spirit then took some tobacco and tobacco-seed and gave them to the man, and gave to the woman one seed of every kind of grain, and showed her every herb and root that was good for food.

The roots and herbs were made when the earth was made. When the Great Spirit gave tobacco to the man he told him that when he wanted to speak to the winds or the beasts to put tobacco in the fire and they would hear him. After the Great Spirit gave these things to the man and woman, he told them to look down; and they looked down, and saw a little child standing between them. The Great Spirit told them that they must take care of the children. The Great Spirit then created one man and one woman of every tribe and tongue on the earth, and told them in the Winnebago language that they would live on the center of the earth. The Great Spirit then made the beasts and birds for the use of man. He then looked down upon his children and saw that they were happy. The Great Spirit made the fire and tobacco for the Winnebagoes, and all the other Indians obtained their fire and tobacco from them; and this is the reason why all the other tribes call the Winnebago their *dear* elder brothers.

After the Great Spirit made all these things he did not look down upon the earth again for one hundred and eighteen years. He then looked down and saw the old men and women coming out of their wigwams, grey-headed and stooping, and that they fell to pieces. The Great Spirit then thought that he had made the Indians to live too long, and that they increased too fast. He then changed his plan, and sent four thunders down to tell the Indians that they must fight; and they did go to war and kill each other. After that they did not increase so fast. The Good Spirit took the good Indians who were killed in battle to himself, but the bad Indians who were killed went to the west. After a while the Bad Spirit waked up, and saw what the Good Spirit had done, and thought he could do as much; so he set to work to make an Indian, and he made a black man. He then tried to make a black bear, and made a grizzly bear. He then made some snakes, but they were all venomous. The Bad Spirit made all the worthless trees, the thistles, and useless weeds that grow on the earth. He also made a fire, but it was not so good as the fire the Good Spirit made and gave to the Indians. The Bad Spirit tempted the Indians to steal and lie, and when the Indians who committed these crimes died they went to the Bad Spirit. The Good Spirit commanded the Indians to be good, and they were so until the Bad Spirit tempted them to do wrong.

The movement of the Winnebago into Iowa in accordance with the Treaty of 1832 proved a difficult task. The Winnebago themselves feared they might fall victims of Sioux and Sauk and Fox scalping knives. Unscrupulous traders made every effort to dissuade them because they would be unable to sell the Winnebagoes whisky. After

five years of stalemate a deputation of Winnebago chiefs and braves journeyed to Washington in the fall of 1837 to make another treaty with their Great White Father. The Winnebago agreed to remove to the Neutral Ground within eight months of the ratification of the treaty. They also surrendered their right to hunt upon a twenty-mile strip at the east end of the Neutral Ground.

Time passed, and the Winnebago continued to occupy their old haunts in Wisconsin, meanwhile annoying the pioneer settlers by their theft of live-stock and other property. By the spring of 1839, however, a few tribes had crossed into Iowa. Winneshiek's band had located on the Upper Iowa River some fifty miles from Fort Crawford. Two Shillings' band was encamped near the Winnebago School on Yellow River while Little Priest's and Whirling Thunder's bands were living on a farm some fifteen miles west of the school. All the other Winnebago bands — those of Big Canoe, Waukon, Yellow Thunder, Caramanee, Dandy, Little Soldier, Decorah, and Big Head — still lingered east of the Mississippi in Wisconsin.

Finally, all patience being lost, Congress demanded that General Henry Atkinson remove the Winnebago from Wisconsin "at all hazards." Eastern papers were filled with reports concerning a possible war to the death. The departure

from Buffalo, New York, of Colonel William J. Worth with 600 men of the Eighth Infantry to remove the recalcitrant Winnebago was chronicled with considerable apprehension. About the same time a letter from Wisconsin quoted a Winnebago chief as declaring that they would not go to Iowa "as it made but little difference whether they [the Winnebago] were killed by the whites or the Sauk and Sioux" if they settled in the Neutral Ground. Colonel Worth's troops, aided by the Fifth Infantry under Brigadier General Brooke and United States Dragoons under Captain Edwin V. Sumner, finally removed the whole body of Winnebago numbering about seventeen hundred to the Neutral Ground. It was felt, *Niles' National Register* reported, that "the presence of one thousand regulars contributed to this desirable result."

The Winnebago were not the only ones who were concerned about their presence in the Neutral Ground. In his third Annual Message delivered to the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa on November 3, 1840, Governor Lucas declared:

> The situation of this nation, in connection with the Winnebagoes who have recently been removed to the tract of country within this Territory, known as the neutral ground, bordering in part on our northern settlements, and partly on the Sac and Fox country, should admonish us to be on our guard and to depend upon ourselves

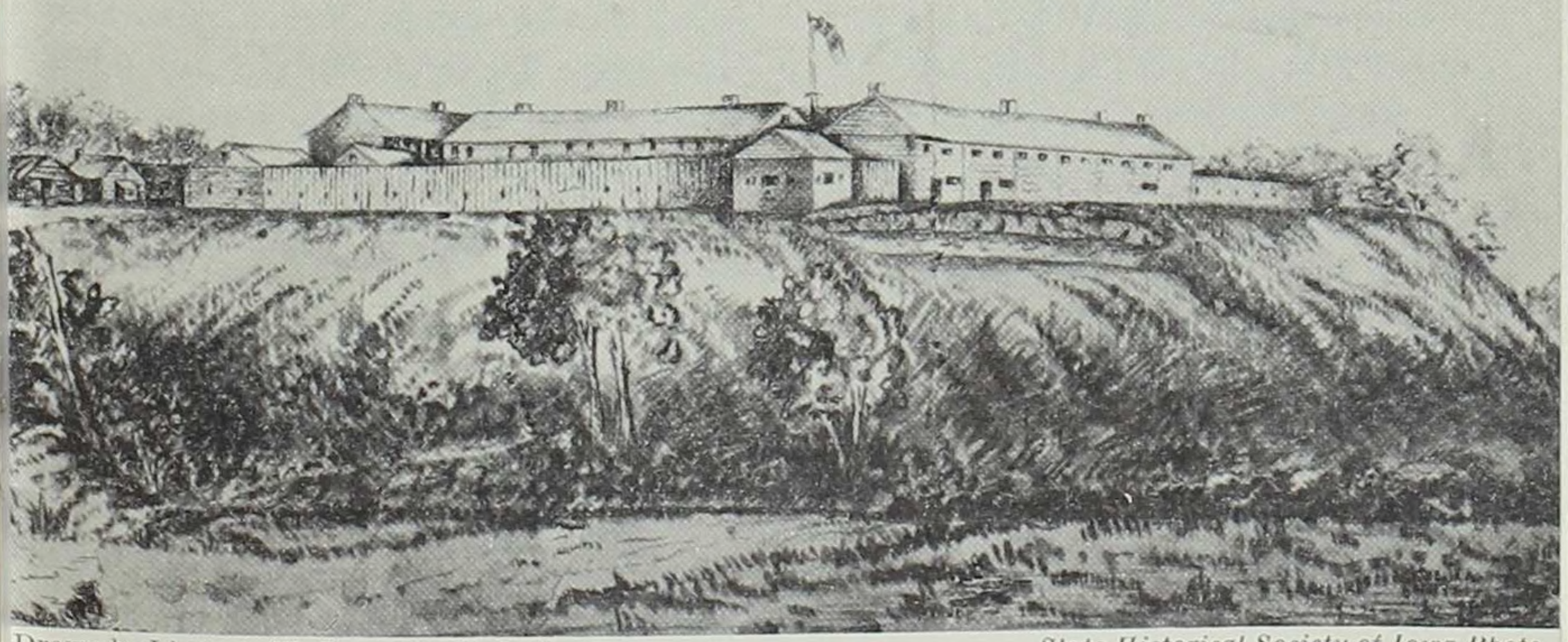
for defence in case hostilities should be commenced by them. In consideration of this state of things, I would respectfully suggest to the legislative assembly the expediency of authorizing by law, the organization of a number of mounted volunteer riflemen, say one company at least to every regiment of militia within the Territory, with authority for the commandant of any brigade to increase the number to a battalion within his brigade, and to provide for calling them into service in case of Indian depredations or threatened invasion. This precautionary measure can do no harm, and may ultimately secure our frontier from an Indian war.

Although rumors of war and frontier depredations persisted no serious outbreak occurred during the brief sojourn of the Winnebago in Iowa.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Drawn by Capt. S. Eastman, U. S. A. From H. R. Schoolcraft's *Indian Tribes*

Indian Squaws Gathering Wild Rice



Drawn by Lieut. A. W. Reynolds, U. S. A. *State Historical Society of Iowa Photo*

Fort Atkinson in 1842

WA-KAWN

WA-KAUN-HA-KA

WA-KAWN, the *Snake,* a war chief of the Winnebago, was born in the Green Bay area and died following a drunken spree which accompanied the payment of the annuity by the government at Prairie du Chien in November, 1838. Wa-Kawn had fought with the British during the War of 1812. After that struggle he became a firm friend of the Americans and always kept his word after signing a treaty. He was the first to cross the Mississippi, encouraged his children to go to school, and took up learning himself, occasionally even helping his wife.

WA-KAUN-HA-KA, or the *Snake-Skin,* was a powerful, 6′ 3″ chief, the son of a French trader and a Winnebago mother. In his early years, Wa-Kaun-Ha-Ka was a successful hunter and a fair warrior. He had eleven wives and a numerous progeny. In later life he was given to dissipation which led to premature decrepitude. On one occasion, during a drunken brawl, his nose was almost bitten off and Wa-Kaun-Ha-Ka felt disgraced. It was not long afterwards, however, that his adversary was murdered. By whom, nobody knew.

HOO-WAN-NE-KA

A-MIS-QUAM

HOO-WAN-NE-KA, the *Little Elk,* was a chief of the Winnebago, who fought with the British against the Americans in the War of 1812. After the war, finding the British had made peace with the enemy without the knowledge of the Indians, he became the fast friend of the Americans. Little Elk was descended from the Caramanie family, the most distinguished band of the Winnebago tribe. The portrait was made on the occasion of his appearance before the President of the United States, at Washington, in 1824, as a delegate from his tribe.

A-MIS-QUAM, the *Wooden Ladle,* a noted leader of the Winnebago. He was born of a Winnebago mother and a Frenchman named Descarrie, a name by which A-Mis-Quam himself was known. He was a fine looking, tall man, with a commanding mien, and wielded great influence among the Winnebagoes. He generally planned strategic campaigns against the enemy, usually the Chippewa, and he was very successful, returning laden with spoils and scalps. His position as war chief, or general, was unique among the Winnebago.

Drawn by Capt. S. Eastman, U. S. A. From H. R. Schoolcraft's *Indian Tribes*

A Winnebago Indian Camp

Drawn by Capt. S. Eastman, U. S. A. From H. R. Schoolcraft's *Indian Tribes*

Medicine Dance of the Winnebagoes

In the Neutral Ground

The Winnebago were still a powerful tribe when they moved into the Neutral Ground. It was estimated they numbered 3,800 individuals in 1650. Their number was set at 5,800 in 1820 while in 1837 and again in 1843 the figure was placed at 4,500. Although by no means small in number, the Winnebago did not relish serving as a buffer between enemy tribes in the Neutral Ground.

The Neutral Ground

The Neutral Ground dated back to the Great Council of 1825 at Prairie du Chien when a treaty was signed on August 19, between the United States and the assembled representatives of the Chippewa, Sauk, Fox, Menominee, Winnebago, Ottawa, and Potowatomi Indians. No cession of land was involved, the main purpose of the treaty being to allow the United States to draw a line which would limit the respective hunting grounds of two bitter foes, the Sioux on the north and the Sauk and Fox on the south. The boundary line agreed upon ran from the mouth of the Upper Iowa River in a "direct line to the second or upper fork of the Desmoines river."

Five years later, on July 15, 1830, the Sauk and

Fox agreed to surrender a strip twenty miles wide on the south side of the neutral line established by the Treaty of 1825, while the Sioux ceded a similar amount to the north of it. This had created a neutral territory forty miles in width between the Mississippi and the Des Moines River. The Winnebago had been moved into the central portion of this Neutral Ground.

Fort Atkinson

To further allay the fears of the Winnebago, Captain Isaac Lynde with Company F of the Fifth Infantry had crossed the Mississippi with eighty-two officers and men and on May 31, 1840 encamped on the north bank of the Turkey River a few miles above the agency house and mission school. The place was named "Camp Atkinson" in honor of the department commander — Brigadier General Henry Atkinson.

Two days later some fifty mechanics arrived from Prairie du Chien and began erection of the barracks and quarters. On June 24, 1841, Captain Edwin V. Sumner arrived with Company B of the First United States Dragoons, making the garrison about 160 strong. For the next six years Fort Atkinson continued as a two company post.

When Fort Atkinson was completed in 1842, four long rectangular barracks, two of stone and two of logs hewn flat, enclosed a square parade and drill ground of more than an acre. These buildings were two stories high and twenty feet

from the ground to the eaves, each having an upper porch along its entire length. Commissioned officers and their families occupied one of the stone barracks; non-coms and their families lived in one of hewn logs. Private soldiers used the other two barracks. The lower part of their stone building was used as a hospital, while the lower part of the other was divided up into rooms, one of which served as a chapel and school.

As Bruce E. Mahan records:

> At one end of the parade ground a tall flag-staff towered above the works. A gunhouse with thick stone walls and peaked roof occupied the southwest corner of the works, which with its counterpart in the northeast corner guarded the approaches to the four sides of the stockade. In the southeast corner stood the stone magazine or powder-house while in the opposite corner was located the quartermaster's store-house adjoined by the sutler's store, with the guardhouse nearby. A picket fence of squared logs twelve feet high with loop holes at intervals of four feet enclosed the buildings and with the two blockhouses made a rectangular fort of formidable appearance.
>
> North of the fort and across a street were located the bakery, the blacksmith shop, and carpenter shops. The stables were some 40 feet wide and 300 feet long running in a north and south direction. Beginning near the powder-house and extending nearly the entire length of one side of the stockade was the sentinel's beat with its platform about three feet below the sharpened tips of the logs. At one end of the beat a small shelter protected the guard during inclement weather.

The construction of Fort Atkinson, and the mil-

itary road connecting it with Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien, cost the government about $90,000. On February 24, 1849, the War Department ordered Fort Atkinson abandoned. In July, 1853, the government sold the buildings of the Fort at public auction for a paltry $3,521.

The Winnebago Agency

The Winnebago Agency was located about four miles below Fort Atkinson on the Turkey River. Rev. David Lowry, the sub-agent, reported in September, 1840, that he expected to remove the sub-agency and the Winnebago School on Yellow River to the Turkey River below Fort Atkinson. Arrangements had been made for breaking one thousand acres of land on the Turkey River, two blacksmiths had been sent there, and one to the Red Cedar River. A grist mill was also being erected.

By 1842 Lowry reported most of the Winnebago were settled in the new territory: 873 were living on Sioux lands, 254 on the Upper Iowa River, and 756 near the sub-agency. Temptation, however, had not been left behind. Rev. Lowry declared that thirty-nine Indians had perished in drunken brawls the preceding year and many others were injured. "Unless something more effectual than has yet been tried, can be adopted for the preservation of the Winnebagoes, it is evident they must soon be numbered with nations *that have been*."

David Lowry continued as sub-agent until July 5, 1844, when he was succeeded by James R. McGregor, who in turn was succeeded by Jonathan E. Fletcher on June 2, 1845. Apparently much of the time of these men was spent in a vain effort to lead the Winnebago to a better way of life. In his report to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in September, 1845, Governor John Chambers declared:

> Of the Winnebagoes I regret to have to repeat that they are the most drunken, worthless, and degraded tribe of which I have any knowledge. They have heretofore wasted their annuity provisions in a very short time after receiving them, and the large sum paid them annually in money passes almost immediately into the hands of the traders — so that there is some portion of almost every year in which they suffer for food. An attempt was made last year, under the authority of the department, to guard against this painful state of things, by applying a part of their annuity to the purchase of provisions, but they obstinately protested against it, and the benevolent intention of the department was defeated by the timidity and ignorance of the late sub-agent; and the effect of it would have been intense suffering, but that the same sub-agent, by transcending his powers and applying money put into his hands by the Government for other purposes, to the purchase of provisions, saved them from the consequences of the obstinacy with which they refused to let their own money be supplied.
>
> The habitual drunkenness of this tribe, and their habit of wandering into the settled parts of Wisconsin, and of this Territory, and their obstinate perseverance in establishing themselves in considerable numbers on the Missis-

sippi river, out of their own country, in direct violation of their treaties with us, has made it very desirable to compel them to keep within their own bounds; and on several occasions they have been brought in by military detachments from Fort Atkinson, but they almost immediately wander off again; and it is now estimated by the sub-agent at Turkey river, that about one half of the tribe is in Wiskonsin and along the Mississippi.

The Winnebago won no prizes for farming during their brief stay in Iowa. Wheat, corn, potatoes, beans, turnips, buckwheat, and oats were the chief crops. One of the difficulties of the agent was to keep the Indians from eating the seed given them and killing the work oxen. The report of the distribution of work on the farm is enlightening. Of the 296 acres enclosed, 94 acres were cultivated by white laborers, 84 by squaws, 58 by half-breeds, and 24 left uncultivated.

If the conditions of the Winnebago in the Neutral Ground were lamentable, the scoundrels responsible for their plight were not difficult to point out. According to sub-agent Jonathan Fletcher:

> It would be a delightful task to lead this people [the Winnebagoes], step by step, in the path of civilization and improvement, if that path were not blockaded at every step by a whiskey keg, and every effort to promote their welfare and happiness thwarted and counteracted by a set of heartless whiskey dealers established along the line of the Indian country, a few feet beyond the jurisdiction of the military officer and sub-agent, for the purpose of plundering these Indians of their money and their goods; to rob them of their food, their clothing, their vir-

tue, and their health: but it is idle to complain; the laws of the Territory are inoperative and impotent to remedy this evil; and the hope, once entertained, that the state of public morals among the hardy settlers of our frontier would become sufficiently elevated and correct to forbid the longer existence of these nuisances, has ceased to exist.

With the removal of the Winnebago to Minnesota Territory, the Winnebago Agency was ordered closed on May 18, 1848. Agent Jonathan Fletcher and his few remaining charges shortly began their long 310-mile trek to their new home on the Watab River in Minnesota.

The Winnebago School

A feature of the Winnebago sojourn in Iowa was the school for Winnebago children. It first was located on the Yellow River, a short distance from Prairie du Chien, but later, when the Winnebago moved into the Neutral Ground, it was transferred to a spot adjoining the Agency a few miles below Fort Atkinson.

Reverend David Lowry, a Presbyterian minister who had been appointed by President Andrew Jackson as a teacher for the Winnebago, arrived in Prairie du Chien late in the fall of 1834. Early in 1835 Lowry opened the school on Yellow River, a short distance above the mouth of that stream. His wife, Mary Ann Lowry, acted as his assistant. When Indian Agent Joseph Street visited the school on April 30, 1835, he found only six pupils attending regularly, but he was cheered

by the fact that more Winnebago were visiting the place daily. Governor Henry Dodge, while visiting the school in February, 1837, expressed delight with its progress. By December, 1837, the enrollment had increased to forty-one pupils.

The year 1839 marked the peak of attainment for the school on Yellow River. A report in December showed an enrollment of 79 pupils — 43 boys and 36 girls. During the year the girls had made two hundred garments — shirts, trousers, dresses, skirts, coats, and aprons — all the clothing needed by the pupils in the school. When J. H. Lockwood and B. W. Brisbois visited the school in August, 1840, they marveled at the progress made by the Winnebago and declared they had never seen a more orderly or ambitious school, even of white children.

But the days of the school on Yellow River were numbered. On October 1, 1840, the teachers were notified that their services were no longer needed, the buildings sold, and a new location on the Turkey below Fort Atkinson selected.

In his *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846,* John B. Newhall expressed enthusiasm with the Winnebago school in its new location on the Turkey River. Newhall felt that the zeal of the "children of the forest" coupled with the "efforts made in imparting instruction" had been attended with "the happiest results." Between 60 and 120 "scholars" were in daily attendance and their aptness in "ac-

quiring a knowledge of geography, and the various branches of learning," was truly astonishing.

Newhall found Mrs. A. Lockwood, the former "attentive hostess" of the Burlington House in Burlington, Iowa, in charge of the *Domestic Economy* department. According to Newhall:

> It is an interesting spectacle to behold, in the midst of the forest, far beyond the confines of civilization, an assemblage of one hundred children of Nature, eschewing the wild excitement of savage life, throwing aside the bow and quiver, and bowing to the shrine of learning.

Although much stress was placed on household affairs, the literary side of the Winnebago children's education was not neglected. Through the kindness of a friend who had visited the school Newhall received a few "fugitive scraps of original composition" from two little Indian girls. The following composition by one, according to Newhall, reveals "the artlessness and simplicity of description which marks the child of Nature."

WINNEBAGO SCHOOL

I like to see another Spring come; I love to see all the beautiful flowers growing. I like to take a walk in the woods, and hear the birds singing upon the trees. In a little while all the Indians will come back, and fix their wigwams with new bark. I like to go and live in a new bark wigwam. When all the children come back from hunting, they are glad to come in school again. A great many school children have died. When any one dies, they paint their face, then put every thing new on; then dress them very fine, and bury them. Then they take goods,

and put it on the grave; and if it is a woman, the women gather then together and play games; if it is a boy, the boys gather themselves, and play ball; and if it is a girl, the girls gather themselves together and play. The Indians have a great many things to do. They say the white people when they die go to one place, and the Indians go to another place. At a medicine feast they have an otter skin, or some other skin, which their medicine is in, and call them medicine bags; they shoot themselves down, and say those that join the feast that God would forgive their sins, and those that stay out are sinners; and they must fix themselves very nice if they go to the feast, if they dont fix themselves God would not like them.

MARGARET PORTER

The land which the Winnebago occupied in the Neutral Ground was, according to Newhall, "one of the most desirable, healthy and picturesque regions of the West." The Turkey River and its tributaries abounded with the most delicious mountain trout. Perennial springs of purest water gushed from every ledge; wild honey could be obtained throughout the forest land. Prairie hens, wild turkeys, rabbits, deer, and other wild game could be found in abundance. Herds of buffalo roamed the prairie a scant two days journey to the west of Fort Atkinson. Unhappily, the Winnebago did not linger long enough to enjoy the beauty and productivity of the Turkey River Valley. As Iowa approached statehood in 1846 steps were already being taken to move the Winnebago from the borders of the Hawkeye State.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

The Winnebago Leave Iowa

The removal of the Winnebago during the summer of 1848 was one of the most colorful incidents in Iowa and Upper Mississippi steamboat history. It was a difficult task; but, if newspaper accounts can be relied upon, the profits accruing to the owners of the steamboat *Dr. Franklin* amply repaid them for their work.

By the treaty of 1846 the Winnebago had agreed to cede their claims and privileges in the Neutral Ground and remove northward to a spot provided by the government. A strip of land at the mouth of the Crow Wing River was finally designated. Since over two thousand Winnebago were involved in this transfer, a detachment of troops from Fort Atkinson was ordered to accompany them. Five hundred head of cattle were taken along for subsistence; while three hundred teams were required to haul the baggage which made up this Indian camp. At Wabasha's village the party was to be picked up by steamboat and carried as far as St. Paul, but when the Indians assembled on the prairie just below Wabasha's village, they refused to move another foot. Captain Russell Blakeley has left a report of the episode.

After the agent had nearly despaired of success, the only alternative left was to sent to Capt. Eastman of Fort Snelling for additional troops, which, with a six-pounder, were sent under the command of Lieut. Hall, to see whether he could encourage the fellows to go. In canvassing the situation, Lieut. Hall became suspicious that the chief, Wabasha, whose village was just above the prairie upon the Rolling Stone creek, had in some way encouraged the Winnebagoes not to go. He arrested Wabasha and brought him on board the Dr. Franklin, and chained him to one of the stanchions of the boat on the boiler deck, evidently with the intention of frightening him; but after a short time he thought better of it, and released him. This was regarded as a great outrage to this proud chief, and it was not regarded in favorable light by those having charge of the Winnebagoes, who numbered over two thousand souls, besides Wabasha's band; but it finally passed without trouble. All the men in charge of the Indians were constantly urging them to consent to the removal, and talks were almost of daily occurrence, which would always end in Commissary Lieut. J. H. McKenny's sending down to the camp more flour, sugar, meat and coffee, realizing that when their stomachs were full they were more peaceable.

One morning the troops, agent, and all in charge, were astounded to find the Indian camp deserted; not an Indian, dog or pony was left. The canoes that had brought part of them were gone as well. Everything in camp that could hunt was started to find them. The Dr. Franklin was sent down the river to overtake them if they had gone in that direction, and I think it was three days before they were found. They had taken their canoes and gone down the river to the mouth of the Slough, and thence had gone over into Wisconsin and were comfortably encamped on the islands and shores of the river, but were nearly

starved. They promised to return to their camp the next day in their canoes. About ten o'clock the next day those on watch saw them coming out of the head of the Slough some three miles above the steamboat landing. It was one of our beautiful summer mornings, with not a ripple on the water; and when these two thousand men, women, children, and dogs, passed down, floating without even using a paddle, except to keep in the stream, all dressed in their best, they presented such a picture as I have not seen equaled since. They were disposed to show themselves at their best. Lieut. McKenny met them at their camp with provisions, and the old *status quo* was re-established.

The Winnebago were fearful lest the Sioux should object to this removal into their country, and so it was decided to send the *Dr. Franklin* to St. Paul for the purpose of picking up the principal Sioux chiefs to meet the Winnebago in council. When the Sioux were gathered together they presented a colorful spectacle. Each chief was fitted out from head to foot with a new suit consisting of blue frock coat, leggins, moccasins, silk plug hat, white ruffled shirt, and a small American flag. After several days of orations the Winnebago finally agreed to go. Several trips were required to remove the whole tribe and its equipment.

But some of the Indians were obdurate and steadfastly refused to leave their homes and migrate with the rest of the tribe. An old Winnebago settled on the bank of the Wisconsin River,

denied any relationship to his tribe, and presented three land office certificates for forty acres of land. Despite every effort on his part to remain behind, the *Dr. Franklin* carried him northward.

During the exodus the newspapers in the mining district were filled with reports of the progress of the *Dr. Franklin*. Charges were made that the Winnebago were carried back and forth several times and the government assessed the cost. The Indians, it appears, enjoyed the novelty of the steamboat trip: it was said they rode up the river, disembarked, sprang into their canoes, and paddled back to Wabasha, a distance of over one hundred miles, in order to enjoy the excellent food and accommodations of the steamboat.

Fifteen years after their removal into Minnesota a portion of the Winnebago were transported to Fort Randall in Nebraska. It was a scant two hundred miles overland in a southwesterly direction to the new home, or no farther than the Winnebago might go on a summer's hunt. It was well nigh ten times as far by steamboat down the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers and up the Missouri. But the Winnebago enjoyed the easy motion and good food of the steamboat, and so the government agreed to transport them in this way. Proceeding down the Minnesota River from Mankato, the Winnebago boarded the steamboat *Canada* at St. Paul. A local editor has left this impression of the Winnebago:

Their looks indicate anything but the "good Indians" that we read about in missionary works, and it is probable that Satan would not have great difficulty in selecting and officering at *least* a full company, who would be admirably adapted for his body-guard. It is very charming, indeed, to read in Hiawatha verse of the "noble Indian," but we acquit Longfellow of any intention to personify the Winnebagoes. He must have alluded to some tribe now extinct, as that class of Indians don't roam in this region at present. — The only nobility we could discover consisted of half-dressed bodies with ugly, devilish faces, hideously daubed with paint.

As usual, the squaws were occupied with housework, washing, cooking, &c., while the men and boys participated in various kinds of amusements, a large number being industriously engaged in doing nothing. The "moccasin game," as it is called, was their favorite sport, though occasionally a deck of cards would be called into requisition to while away the hours. We saw none of the devotional exercises for which the Sioux are so celebrated, and fear that they were not able to bring their religion away from the reservation.

Near the centre of the encampment they had placed a young sapling and fastened to this the keep-sakes that had been captured from the Sioux who were murdered by them last week. They consisted of two scalps stretched upon hoops and attached to long poles, the skins of fingers with nails pendent, tufts of hair, pieces of flesh, &c., fastened upon bushes, all ornamented with fancy colored bits of cloth. Some of the half breeds and "good Sioux" who are at the Fort examined them and gave it as their opinion that the scalps were taken from Sioux who were living with the Winnebagoes, as those upon the plains never wear such short hair. They looked savage when viewing the relics of their brethren and vow vengeance.

During the forenoon they participated in one of their grand scalp dances, forming a circle about the sapling, the men beating upon drums and sticks, while the squaws carried the scalps and other relics, and all shouted and sung their wild war cadence as they moved in the "misty maze of the dance."

There were 756 Winnebago aboard the *Canada* when she arrived at Davenport. An editor who visited the boat while in port described them as a "squalid, wretched looking set" of "Injins." Unfortunately history has not left a record of the Winnebago opinion of the citizens of that thriving Iowa community.

The Winnebago Indians are well known to the people of northwest Iowa since their home in Winnebago, Nebraska, is only a short distance from Sioux City. The burial customs of the ancient Winnebago should be especially interesting because of the John Rice episode in Sioux City in 1951.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

1 A. 1

April 1840

My Winnebago children.

Your Great Father the President of the United States has sent his War chief General Atkinson to remove his children the Winnebagoes to their country west of the Mississippi. — I hope you will listen to his words that they will not pass in at one ear and out at the other but will sink deep in your hearts and be held in remembrance by you. — If you remove peaceably to your country you will comply with your treaty made at Washington with your Great Father who will protect you from the attacks of other Indians. You will go to a country that abounds in Deer and other game: — You will have troops stationed near you; and your good Father Mr Lowry, your Agent, will extend the hand of friendship to you and your children; he will live in your country near you where you will receive your annuities, from the United States: Your Great Father the President will hold you strong by the hand if you do right: the bright chain of friendship will remain unbroken and the Winnebagoes may become a prosperous and happy people. — Should the Winnebagoes refuse to remove to their country they will forfeit their annuities and bring misery and misfortune on themselves, their women and children, and will be compelled by the War Chief to remove from this side of the Mississippi — he has power from your Great Father to call as many men into the field as will oblidge the Winnebagoes to comply with their treaty. — The war chief is kind to the Red skins but his duties will always be performed, he will have my aid and support to carry into effect his instructions from your Great Father — You have good and evil before you and the choice is left to yourselves — I have always been the friend of the Winnebagoes — I have never deceived them — I have held you strong by the hand — but if you refuse to comply with the wishes of the President of the United States, as expressed by his War chief all good men will be opposed to you and will unite to compel you to do right. — Let no evil advisers or bad men advise you to do wrong — do right that you may have a smoth road to travel and a clear sky to sleep under that the Great Spirit may be pleased with his red children the Winnebagoes.

(Signed) HENRY DODGE.

This is a copy of a manuscript written by Governor Henry Dodge of the Territory of Wisconsin. It was discovered in the Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library in Chicago by the writer and is reproduced for the first time for members of the Society.

Red Bird — A Famous Winnebago Chief